



Battle of Wits





Illustrated Classics From India

BATTLE OF WITS

A JATAKA TALE

All living creatures die to be born again, according to Hindu belief. Legend has it that several lifetimes as a Bodhisattva went into the making of the Buddha, the enlightened one.

The Bodhisattva came in many forms – man, monkey, deer, elephant, lion. Whatever his mortal frame, he spread the message of justice and wisdom, tempered with compassion. This wisdom of right thinking and right living is preserved in the Jataka Tales.

We cannot assign a definite date to the Jataka Tales. Taking into account archaeological and literary evidence, it appears that they were compiled between 300 B.C. and A.D. 500. They give us invaluable information about ancient Indian civilization, culture and thought.

According to Maha Ummagga Jataka, the Bodhisattva was once born as Aushadha Kumar, the son of Seth Shrivardhana of Yavamajjhaka. This Chitra Katha recounts a few tales of the childhood of Aushadha Kumar.

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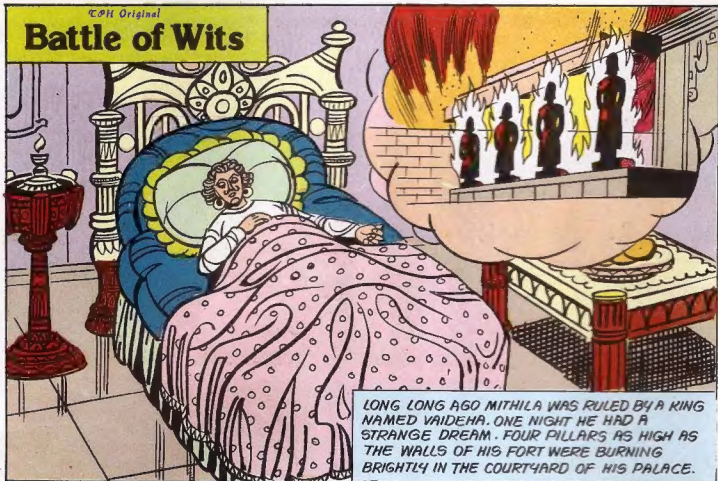
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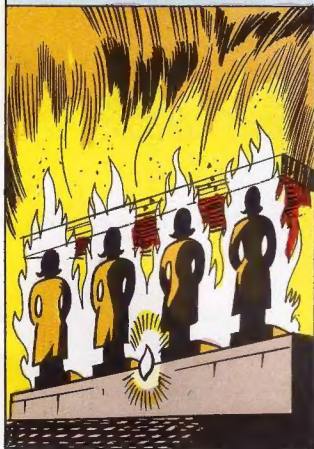


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Battle of Wits



SUDDENLY A TINY FLAME APPEARED AMIDST THE BURNING PILLARS AND...



... GREW TALLER AND TALLER TILL IT DWARFED THEM, THE FORT, THE PALACE AND ALL.

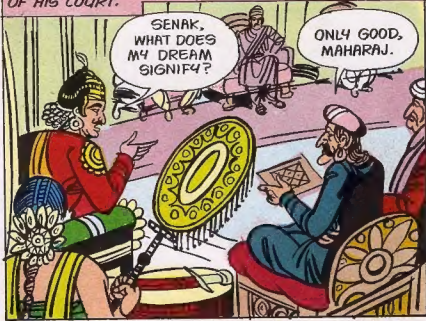


THE KING WOKE UP TREMBLING.



OH GOD!
WHAT A
DREAM!

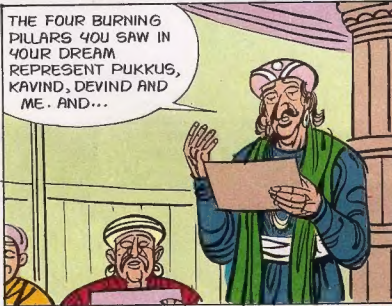
THE NEXT MORNING HE CONSULTED SENAK, PUKKUS, KAVIND AND DEVIND, THE FOUR PANDITS OF HIS COURT.



SENAK,
WHAT DOES
MY DREAM
SIGNIFY?

ONLY GOOD,
MAHARAJ.

THE FOUR BURNING
PILLARS YOU SAW IN
YOUR DREAM
REPRESENT PUKKUS,
KAVIND, DEVIND AND
ME. AND...



... THE BRIGHT
FLAME FORETELLS
THE ADVENT OF A
GREAT SOUL WHOSE
WISDOM WILL
SURPASS OUR
COMBINED
KNOWLEDGE.



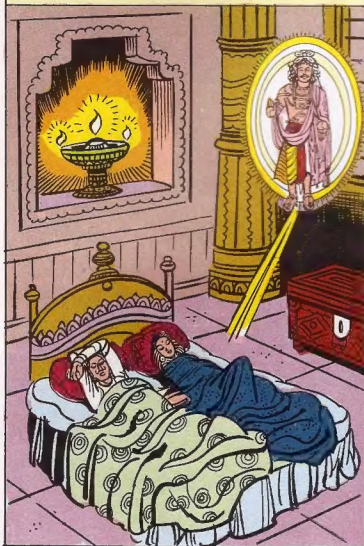
WHEN WILL THIS
GREAT SOUL BE
BORN?



YOUR DREAM
INDICATES THAT HE
ENTERED THE
WOMB OF A NOBLE
MOTHER LAST
NIGHT.



SENAK WAS RIGHT. THE BODHISATVA* HAD ENTERED THE WOMB OF SUMANA DEVI, WIFE OF SHRIVARDHANA, A WEALTHY RESIDENT OF YAVAMAJJHAKA VILLAGE.



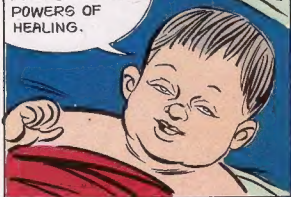
TEN MONTHS LATER, SUMANA DEVI GAVE BIRTH TO A RADIANT SON.



* SEE INTRODUCTION

SUDDENLY, THE NEWBORN BABY
SPOKE IN A CLEAR, MELODIOUS VOICE.

THIS PIECE
OF WOOD
POSSESSES
MYSTERIOUS
POWERS OF
HEALING.



FOR THE PAST SEVEN YEARS, SETH SHRIVARDHANA HAD
BEEN SUFFERING FROM FREQUENT BOUTS OF
HEADACHE.

THE NEXT TIME
I HAVE A
HEADACHE I'LL
TRY THIS
OUT.



THE VERY NEXT DAY HE HAD ONE.. HE
QUICKLY BROUGHT OUT THE PIECE OF
WOOD, RUBBED IT ON A GRINDING-STONE...



...AND APPLIED THE PASTE TO HIS FOREHEAD.
AND LO!

IT'S GONE!
MY HEADACHE
HAS GONE!



I'LL MIX THIS
IN WATER AND
DISTRIBUTE THE
MIXTURE TO THE
AILING.

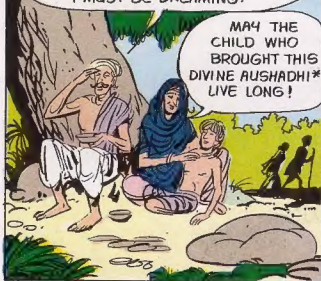


FAME OF THE HERB SPREAD, AND AILING PEOPLE FROM NEAR AND FAR FLOCKED TO SHRIVARDHANA'S HOUSE.

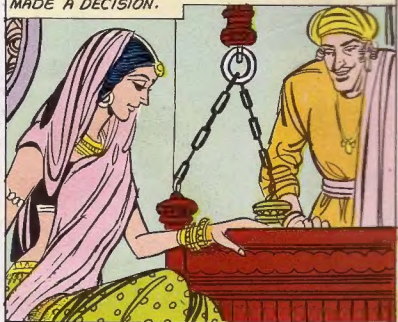


THE PAIN AND AGONY THAT TORTURED ME FOR FIVE LONG YEARS VANISHES WITH JUST ONE DOSE OF MEDICINE! I MUST BE DREAMING.

MAY THE CHILD WHO BROUGHT THIS DIVINE AUSHADHI* LIVE LONG!



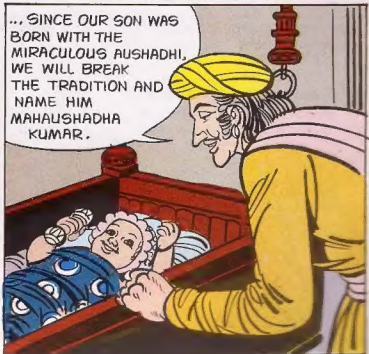
WHEN THE CHILD HAD TO BE NAMED, SHRIVARDHANA MADE A DECISION.



IT IS A TRADITION IN OUR FAMILY FOR THE ELDEST SON TO BE NAMED AFTER HIS GRANDFATHER, BUT...



... SINCE OUR SON WAS BORN WITH THE MIRACULOUS AUSHADHI, WE WILL BREAK THE TRADITION AND NAME HIM MAHAUSHADHA KUMAR.



MAHAUSHADHA KUMAR GREW UP HAPPILY IN THE COMPANY OF THE CHILDREN OF HIS VILLAGE. BUT HE WAS FAR MORE INTELLIGENT AND KNOWLEDGEABLE THAN ANY OF THEM. ONE DAY, WHEN HE WAS BARELY SEVEN YEARS OLD—

AUSHADHA, THE STREETS ARE TOO CROWDED. HOW CAN WE PLAY HERE? LET'S GO INDOORS.

BUT THE RAINS WILL SOON BE HERE AND THEN WE WILL HAVE TO PLAY INDOORS ALL THE TIME.

NO, WE WILL NOT. WE'LL HAVE A NEW TOWN WITH A SHELTERED PLAYGROUND. WE'LL ASK OUR PARENTS TO DONATE THE MONEY FOR IT.

AUSHADHA KUMAR ASSEMBLED ALL THE LOCAL ARTISANS AND SPOKE TO THEM OF HIS PLANS.

I WANT TO RAISE A TOWNSHIP WHICH WILL HAVE A STADIUM FOR CHILDREN, A HOME FOR HOMELESS WOMEN...

...REST-HOUSES FOR TRAVELLERS AND MENDICANTS, AND PUBLIC HALLS FOR PRAYERS AND SETTLING DISPUTES.

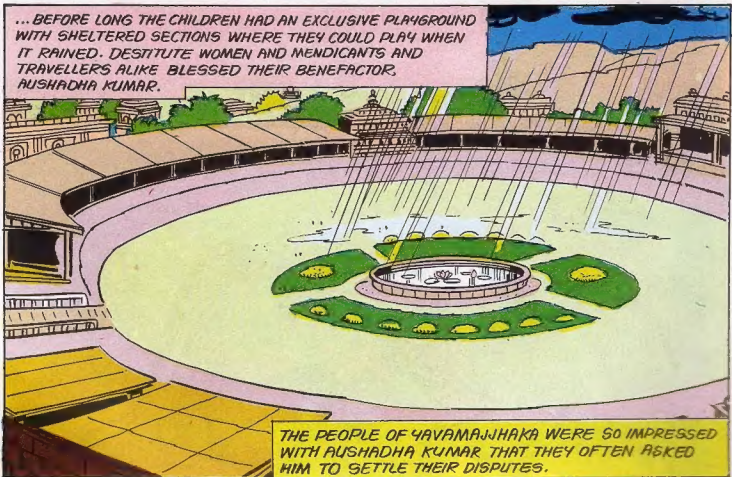
THE SIMPLE ARTISANS OF YAVAMAJJHAKA VILLAGE WERE UNABLE TO VISUALIZE AUSHADHA KUMAR'S IDEAS. SO HE MADE A PLAN OF THE TOWNSHIP FOR THEM. AND...



...WORK BEGAN AND PROGRESSED QUICKLY YET SMOOTHLY UNDER HIS SUPERVISION. AND...

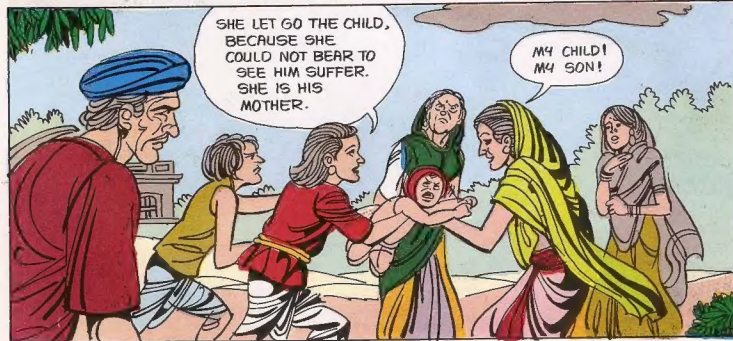


... BEFORE LONG THE CHILDREN HAD AN EXCLUSIVE PLAYGROUND WITH SHELTERED SECTIONS WHERE THEY COULD PLAY WHEN IT RAINED. DESITUTE WOMEN AND MENDICANTS AND TRAVELLERS ALIKE BLESSED THEIR BENEFACTOR, AUSHADHA KUMAR.



THE PEOPLE OF YAVAMAJJHAKA WERE SO IMPRESSED WITH AUSHADHA KUMAR THAT THEY OFTEN ASKED HIM TO SETTLE THEIR DISPUTES.

ONE DAY —



MEANWHILE, AS SEVERAL YEARS HAD PASSED SINCE THE ADVENT OF THE GREAT PANDIT WAS PREDICTED, KING VAIDEHA DECIDED TO SEEK HIM OUT.

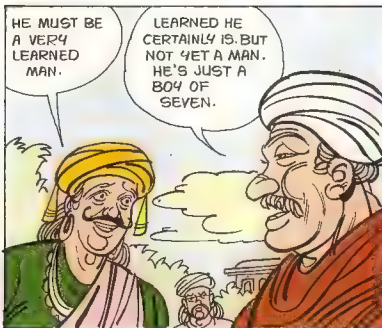


... CAME TO YAVAMAJHAKA.



HE MUST BE A VERY LEARNED MAN.

LEARNED HE CERTAINLY IS, BUT NOT YET A MAN. HE'S JUST A BOY OF SEVEN.



A BOY OF SEVEN? I MUST SEND A MESSAGE TO THE KING.



THE MINISTER'S MESSENGER SPED TO MITHILA.

MAHARAJ, THE MINISTER IS CONVINCED THAT SEVEN-YEAR-OLD AUSHADHA KUMAR OF YAVAMAJHAKA IS THE CHILD YOU ARE LOOKING FOR.

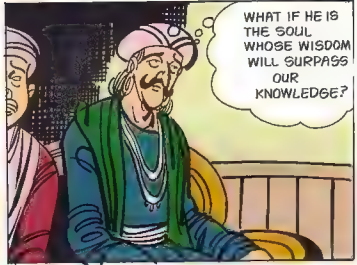


I HAD MY DREAM ABOUT EIGHT YEARS AGO!

SENAK PANDIT, I THINK WE SHOULD INVITE AUSHADHA KUMAR TO MITHILA.



WHAT IF HE IS THE SOUL WHOSE WISDOM WILL SURPASS OUR KNOWLEDGE?



I AM NOT SO SURE, MAHARAJ. PLANNING A TOWNSHIP IS NO CRITERION OF WISDOM OR OF THE GREATNESS OF A SOUL.



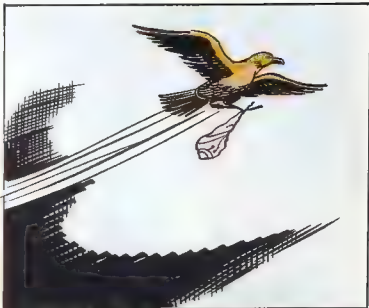
YOU ARE RIGHT.

ASK THE MINISTER TO OBSERVE AUSHADHA KUMAR FOR A FEW MORE DAYS AND TO REPORT ANYTHING UNUSUAL HE SEES.



AS YOU COMMAND, MAHARAJ.

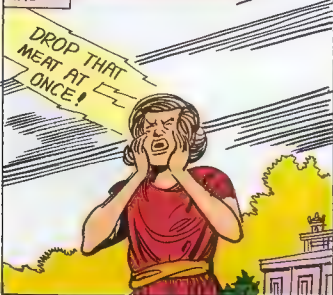
THE MINISTER DID AS HE WAS ORDERED.
THEN ONE DAY—

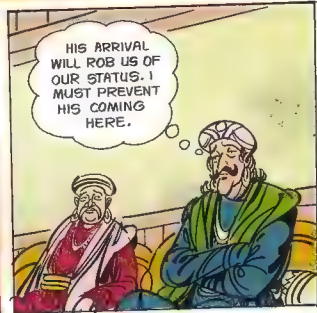


AUSHADHA KUMAR RUSHED LIKE
THE WIND...

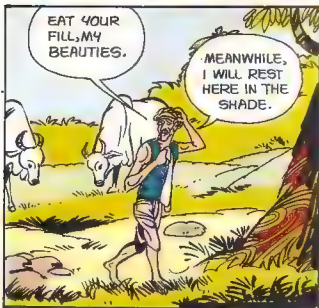


...TILL HE WAS RIGHT BELOW
THE SHADOW OF THE FALCON.
AND—

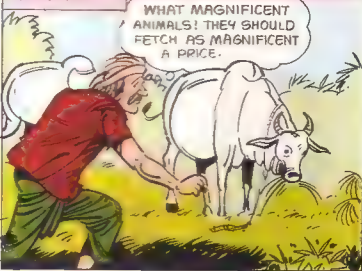


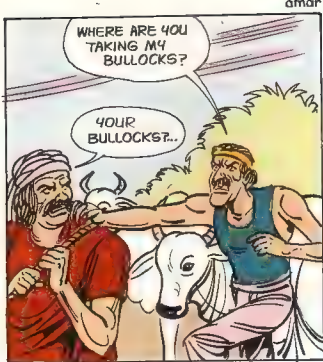


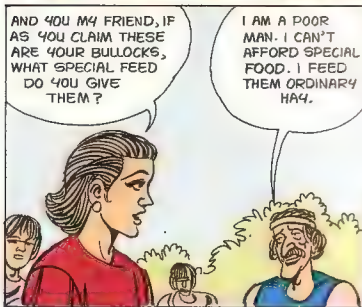
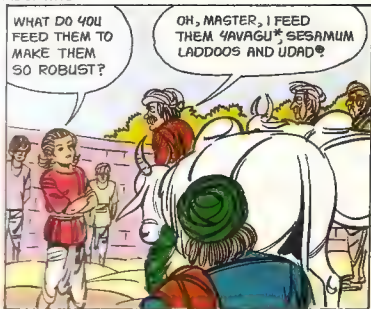
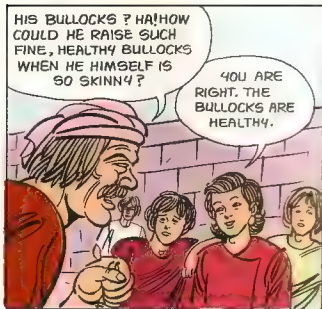
ONE DAY—



AS SOON AS THE OWNER OF THE BULLOCKS DOZED OFF—

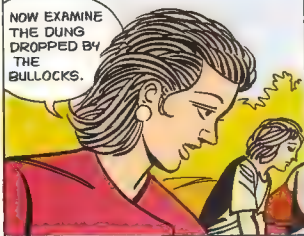






THE PASTE OF MUSTARD LEAVES HAD THE DESIRED LAXATIVE EFFECT.

NOW EXAMINE THE DUNG DROPPED BY THE BULLOCKS.



...DO YOU FIND ANY GRAINS OF BARLEY, SESAMUM OR UDA?

NO! NOT A SINGLE ONE.



SO, YOU FEED YAVAGU AND UDA TO THE BULLOCKS. DO YOU?

4-YES... I MEAN NO, MASTER.

YOU ARE A THIEF!

NO... NO... YES...



ENRAGED BY SUCH RANK DECEIT, AUSHADHA KUMAR'S FRIENDS BEAT UP THE MAN.

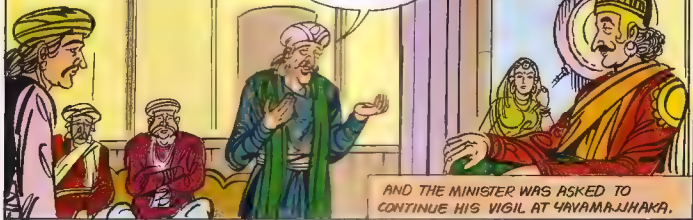
THEN —

THE BULLOCKS ARE YOURS, FRIEND. YOU MAY LEAD THEM AWAY.



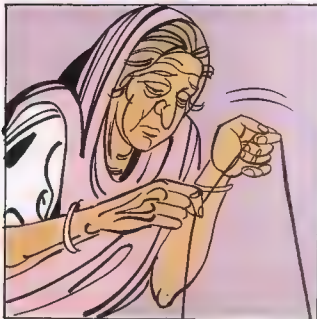
BUT WHEN THE TALE OF THE BULLOCKS WAS NARRATED IN THE COURT OF VAIDEHA —

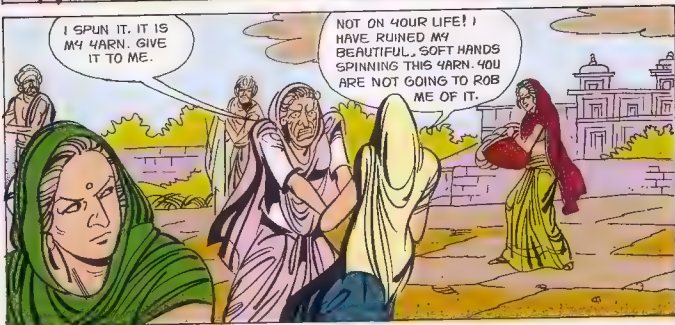
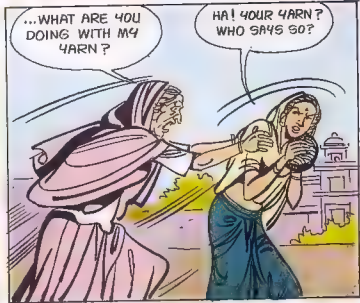
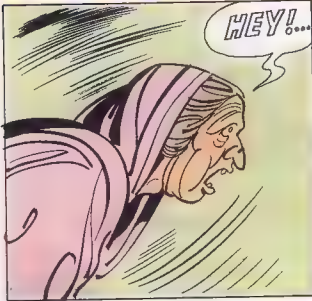
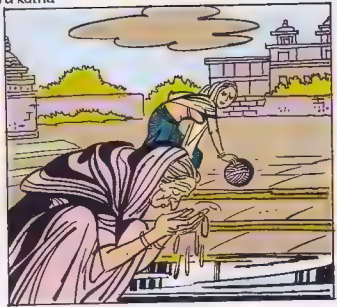
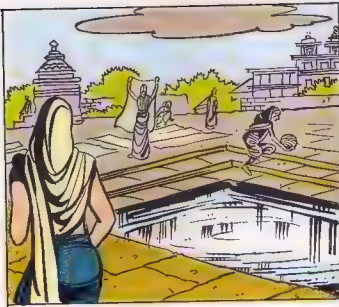
MAHARAJ, ANYONE WITH COMMON SENSE CAN SOLVE SUCH A PROBLEM.



AND THE MINISTER WAS ASKED TO CONTINUE HIS VIGIL AT HAYAMAJJHAKA.

A FEW DAYS LATER, THE CASE OF AN OLD WOMAN WORKING IN A COTTON FIELD PRESENTED THE MINISTER WITH YET ANOTHER INSTANCE OF AUSHADHA KUMAR'S WISDOM.





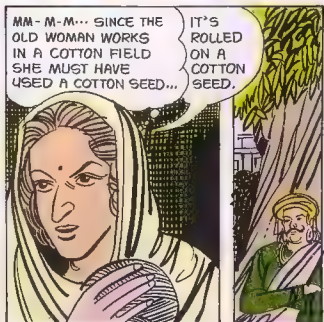
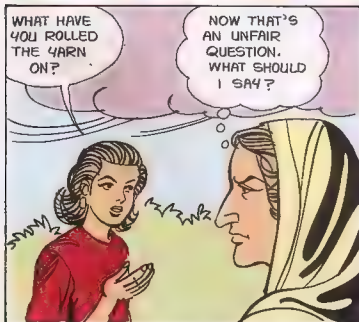
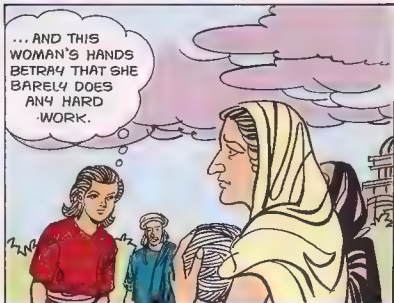
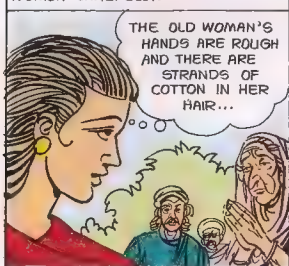
THE TWO WOMEN WERE BROUGHT TO AUSHADHA KUMAR.

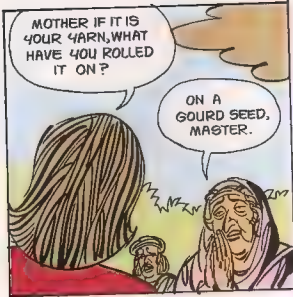


THE EVER ALERT MINISTER WATCHED THE PROCEEDINGS.

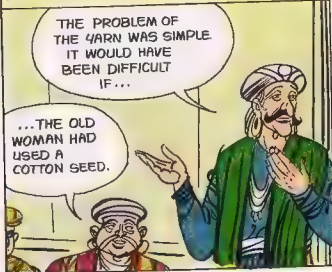


AUSHADHA KUMAR STUDIED THE WOMEN CAREFULLY.

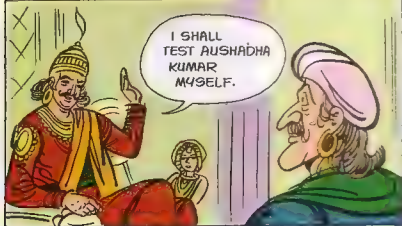




WHEN THE TALE REACHED MITHILA, THE PANDITS YET AGAIN REFUSED TO ADMIT THAT AUSHADHA KUMAR WAS ENDOWED WITH EXCEPTIONAL WISDOM.



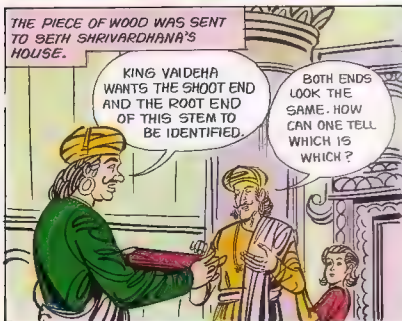
IN THIS MANNER ON SEVEN OCCASIONS DID THE PANDITS OF MITHILA DISPUTE THE WISDOM OF AUSHADHA KUMAR TO STALL HIS INDUCTION INTO THE COURT. BUT VAIDEHA WAS TENACIOUS.

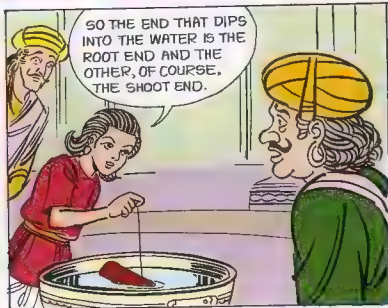
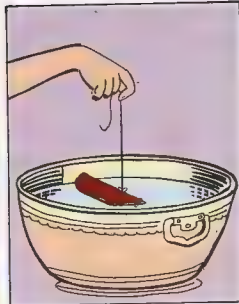


HE HAD THE TAPERING STEM OF A SAPLING CUT AND SHAPED INTO A PERFECT CYLINDER.



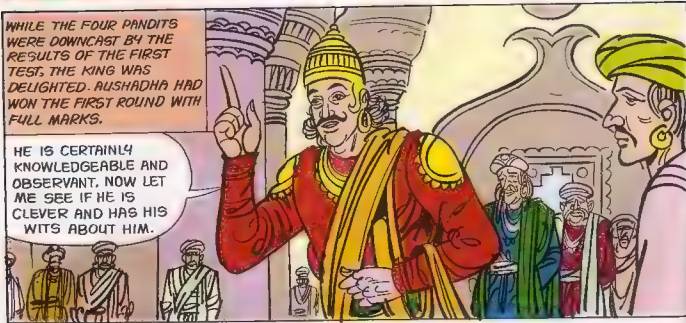
THE PIECE OF WOOD WAS SENT TO SETH SHRIVARDHANA'S HOUSE.

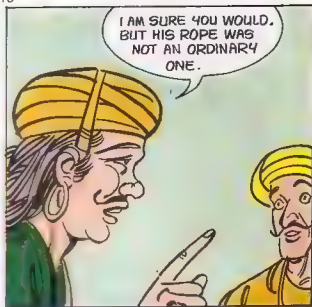
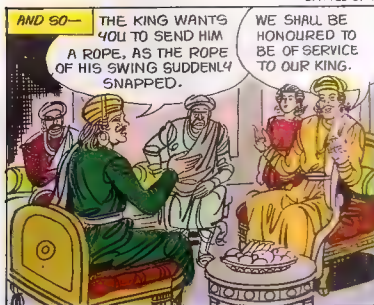




WHILE THE FOUR PANDITS
WERE DOWNCAST BY THE
RESULTS OF THE FIRST
TEST, THE KING WAS
DELIGHTED. AUSHADHA HAD
WON THE FIRST ROUND WITH
FULL MARKS.

HE IS CERTAINLY
KNOWLEDGEABLE AND
OBSERVANT. NOW LET
ME SEE IF HE IS
CLEVER AND HAS HIS
WITS ABOUT HIM.





WHEN THE KING HEARD THE
COUNTER DEMAND —



REMARKABLE!
THE BOY IS
EXTRAORDINARY!

KING VAIDEHA POSED SEVERAL SUCH COMPLEX
PROBLEMS WHICH PUT AUSHADHA KUMAR'S
WITS SEVERELY TO THE TEST. FINALLY —

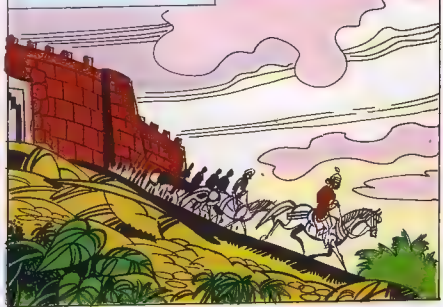
AUSHADHA KUMAR
IS BEYOND DOUBT
A GREAT SOUL,
I SHALL NOW
INVITE HIM TO
JOIN MY
COURT.

BUT,
MAHARAJ...

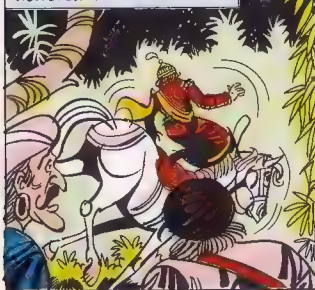


NOW I SHALL
GO AND FETCH
THE GREAT
PANDIT HERE
MYSELF.

NEXT MORNING, THE KING LEFT HIS CAPITAL
FOR YAVAMAJHAKA.



HOWEVER ON THE WAY —



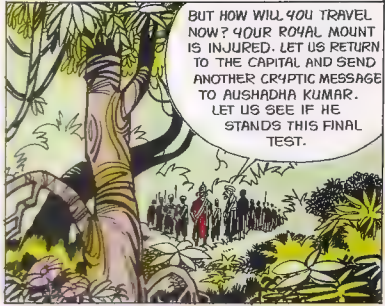
THE HORSE
HAS BROKEN
ITS LEG.

THIS IS A BAD
OMEN, MAHARAJ.
YOU SHOULD
GIVE UP THE
IDEA OF
MEETING
AUSHADHA KUMAR.





IT IS NOT A BAD OMEN. THE HORSE TRIPPED. I WILL NOT BE DETERRED FROM MEETING AUSHADHA KUMAR JUST BECAUSE OF AN ACCIDENT.



BUT HOW WILL YOU TRAVEL NOW? YOUR ROYAL MOUNT IS INJURED. LET US RETURN TO THE CAPITAL AND SEND ANOTHER CRYPTIC MESSAGE TO AUSHADHA KUMAR. LET US SEE IF HE STANDS THIS FINAL TEST.



SOON—

THE ROYAL HORSE IS INJURED, SETH SHRIVARDHANA. PLEASE SEND A MULE OR ITS SUPERIOR FOR THE KING.

WHAT KIND OF A DEMAND IS THIS? A MULE OR ITS SUPERIOR!! SHALL WE SEND A DONKEY WHICH IS SUPERIOR TO THE MULE BY VIRTUE OF BEING ITS FATHER?



FATHER, IT IS NEITHER MULE NOR DONKEY THAT THE KING WANTS, BUT YOU AND ME.



I MUST PUT AN END TO THIS BATTLE OF WITS.

HOW WILL YOU DO THAT SON?

BY SHOWING
DISRESPECT TO
YOU IN THE
COURT,
FATHER.

BUT SON,...
YOU HAVE
ALWAYS
RESPECTED
ME.

AND I ALWAYS WILL,
FATHER. WHAT I AM
GOING TO DO IS
ONLY A PART OF A
SCHEME.

YOU GO TO
THE COURT
FIRST. I WILL
FOLLOW
YOU.

WHEN THE KING ASKS
ME TO TAKE A SEAT,
YOU GET UP AND I
WILL SIT IN YOUR
PLACE.

ALL RIGHT,
SON.

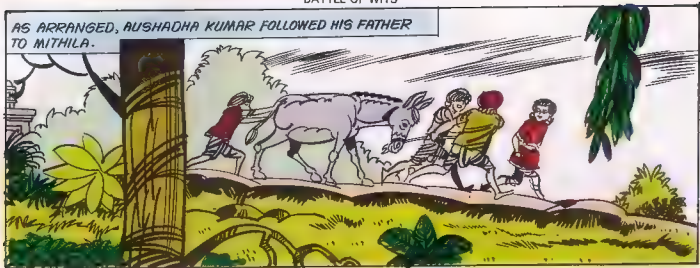
WHEN SETH SHRIVARDHANA
REACHED THE COURT—

GLORY TO
KING
VAIDEHA.

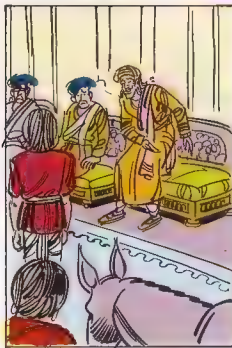
WHERE IS YOUR
SON?

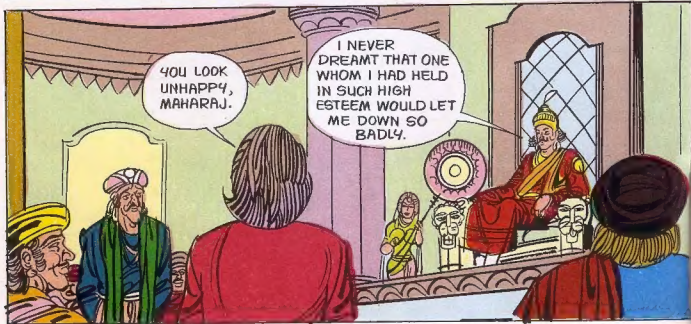
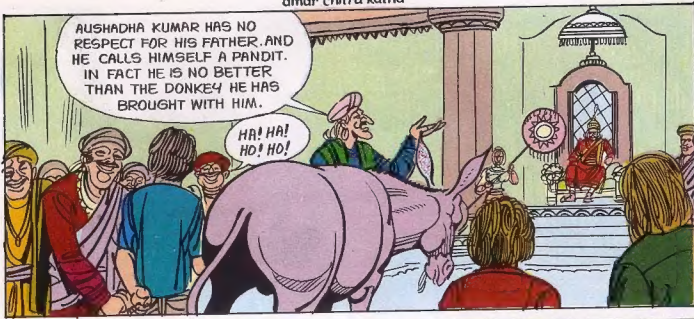
HE
IS ON HIS
WAY,
MAHARAJ.

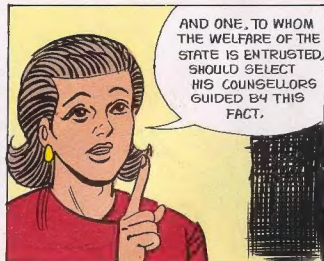
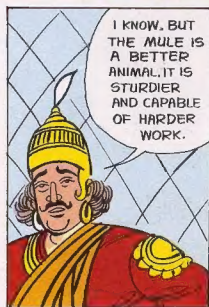
AS ARRANGED, AUSHADHA KUMAR FOLLOWED HIS FATHER TO MITHILA.



WHEN AUSHADHA KUMAR REACHED THE COURT —











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